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ABSTRACT

When budget cuts affected the English department at the University of Georgia in 1991, the writing program was never cut sharply but did suffer in three important ways: class sizes in the freshman program went up, the department replaced full-time with part-time faculty, and a new assistant professor of rhetoric was not hired. Now most freshman courses in English are taught by teaching assistants and some part-time instructors. The junior-level and graduate level writing courses are stretched because of lack of adequate faculty. The biggest change due to the recession is that teachers now must have more students per class. Despite attempts by the administration to manipulate the given situations, class size in freshman English crept up from 17 to 18 to 19, ending finally at 22, although the Dean tried to push it to 25. The recession changed the way part-time faculty were hired and retained, and also caused the university to impose a hiring freeze. This freeze caused the English department, which lost 8 professors out of 47 due to professors retiring or taking jobs elsewhere, to be hard hit. While that situation has seen some improvement, class sizes and fewer part-time instructors are difficult problems that are not going away, since it may be 3 more years before funding returns to pre-recession levels. (HB)

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The Effect of Budget Cuts at the University of Georgia

The University of Georgia's writing program, which operates on the freshman, junior, and graduate levels, is not a separate entity financially from the rest of the English Department, although the large freshman English component receives money from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences ear marked to meet its needs. Even so, the program, including Freshman English, is fully integrated administratively into the Department; consequently, what happens to the department in terms of finances and personnel directly affects the writing program. In fact, the effects of the recent recession, which hit Georgia in 1991 and is just beginning to abate this year, were largely, but not entirely, indirect. In other words, the writing program was never cut sharply but it did suffer in three respects: first, class sizes in the freshman program went up; second, due to financial uncertainty, the department replaced full-time with part-time instructors; and, third, a new assistant professor of rhetoric was not hired.

Although UGA's writing and rhetoric programs operate on three levels, by far the freshman English component is the largest, consisting of two courses, English 101 and English 102. Each year, the department teaches about 3,000 freshman, most of whom take both courses. English 101 stresses

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critical reading and writing arguments, while English 102 stresses critical reading and writing about literature, with some attention to contemporary critical theory. The courses are designed and overseen by the Freshman English Committee, which I, as the Director of Freshman English, chair. Until fairly recently, all members of the Department taught in the freshman program, but that has changed due to a huge increase in the number of English majors which demand the full attention of UGA's tenured and tenure-track faculty. All departments in the university were also required by the upper administration to hire more Teaching Assistants and fewer full-time instructors to teach introductory courses. Now most of the freshman courses are taught by Teaching Assistants and a small group of part-time Instructors.

The junior-level writing program consists of two courses, English 359, Technical Writing, and English 360, Advanced Composition. The department does not now have a specialist in technical communication to teach 359 regularly, although several faculty members have a secondary interest in it and teach the course occasionally. But staffing the course, which draws students in various technical majors from across campus, has been a severe problem for the past two years. English 360, on the other hand, is less of a problem because it is taught more regularly by a variety of faculty members.

On the graduate level, the writing program has three courses, English 685T, Rhetoric and Literature, English 684T,

Theory and Practice of English Prose Style, and English 890T, Current Issues in Rhetorical Theory, a special-topics seminar. In addition to myself, one other faculty member teaches rhetorical and composition theory, although both of us also teach our literary specialties and are therefore stretched thin, especially since I teach only two courses a year because of my administrative responsibilities.

The huge freshman English component receives considerable support from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and, since I arrived in 1988, I have never had trouble, even during the worst times of the recession, getting adequate funding to teach all freshmen in the two freshman courses during the students' freshman year. This state of affairs exists because all upper administrators recognize the importance of writing instruction and consequently are willing to fund the program fully.

This is not to say, however, that the program, especially the freshman component, escaped unscathed from the recession. The change that the teachers in the program notice most grows from their teaching more students. When I first arrived at UGA, the class size in freshman English was low--17 per section. As director of the program, one of my goals, of course, was to keep the numbers down, but this proved to be an impossible task, especially as the new Dean of Arts and Sciences learned that UGA had the lowest class size by far of any large public research university in the region. Most others were in the mid-20s. The English

department managed to hold the Dean off for several years, although the class size did creep up to 18 in 1989 and to 19 in 1990. One way that we managed to keep the size down was by means of the CAI program that we started in 1987 and developed through 1989. We designed this part of the program to allow about half of our freshman to take CAI writing courses in rooms that could hold, we argued, only 19 machines. As enrollment and financial pressures began to mount, however, we were forced to compromise, allowing the non-CAI sections to take in a few more students while keeping the CAI sections at 19. When the recession hit and UGA, like all other state institutions, suffered massive budget cuts, the Dean was forced to economize on many fronts. More computers were shoehorned into the CAI rooms, and the class size jumped to 22 students per section. Even this number was a compromise, because the Dean tried to hike the number to 25. I and the other English department administrators managed to prevent this jump by arguing that 25 students in a writing class on a quarter system that meets 5 days a week would be a hardship that fell on the least powerful members of our faculty, the TAs and instructors.

The second effect of the budget cuts was a drastic change in the way the department hired its instructors. The English department had had a long history of hiring instructors for full year terms to teach three courses per quarter. These instructors, many of whom in years past could make a career in the department, enjoyed full faculty status

and could participate in faculty meetings and serve on departmental committees if they desired. Although their teaching load was heavy (three courses per quarter), they had neither research nor service responsibilities unless they chose to exercise them. With a recession, however, came tightened budgets. Because of severe budget cuts in 1991, there was talk from UGA's President, Charles Knapp, that he would have to lay off tenured faculty in some departments. While a few people in the School of Agriculture's Extension Program were indeed laid off or reassigned, no tenured faculty were lost, but UGA's tenured positions were saved in part by trimming the instructional budget. These cutbacks meant for the Freshman Program that the Dean's office dribbled money out on an as-needed basis. In other words, as enrollments in the program's courses increased during registration, we were given money to cover each new section as we opened it. We could only therefore hire teachers as they were needed, and this fact forced us to hire course-by-course. We could not put instructors under contract for more than a single quarter because the Dean never could guarantee our funding for the full year, only for the given quarter. Furthermore, in any given quarter we faced a dilemma. Should we rehire all of our instructors for one or two courses per quarter or should we terminate most of them and hire a few full time? We generally did our best to offer all of the instructors some work rather than letting most of them go. We did this in part for altruistic reasons, but we

also did it for practical reasons since we could not guarantee at the beginning of the fall the number of sections we would offer winter and spring quarters and therefore did not know with certainty that we would have courses for even a limited number of full time teachers.

The third effect of the recession on the Writing Program was more indirect. In 1991, the English Department lost eight faculty members out of a department of 47 due to people retiring and taking jobs elsewhere. We lost, for instance, three minority hires that year, a specialist in Victorian literature, one in 18th century literature, and a third in critical theory and commonwealth literature. (We were lucky enough, however, to hire two minority candidates for this year on university-wide affirmative action lines.) We also lost in 1991 our only Romantic literature specialist, who for personal reasons went on extended leave to another school. Finally, we lost no fewer than four specialists in 20th century British and American literature, three to retirement, a fourth to a Japanese university. When the recession struck in 1991, Georgia's Board of Regents, the governing body of the state college and university system, immediately imposed a hiring freeze, so not one of the people lost on departmental lines could be replaced in 1991-92. The great fear was, of course, that the lines would be lost permanently and in fact four of them were, although these losses were somewhat mitigated by the department's getting permission to hire two endowed chairs in 20th century literature, Hugh

Kenner and James Nagel, partly using moneys from special university accounts. But both have light teaching loads and could not possibly teach enough to make up for the losses in 20th century.

To make matters worse for the Writing Program, 1991 was the year that the department was scheduled to hire a third specialist in composition and rhetoric. This scholar was going to help UGA further develop its small graduate program in rhetoric, a program that attracts students on both the MA and PhD levels, and to teach technical writing, a course that attracts students from departments such as business and computer science. However, when the department found itself with only three people to teach 20th century British and American literature (which was traditionally one of the department's strengths), the need for a writing specialist seemed less important to the department.

As Director of Freshman English, I found myself constantly facing the same dilemma. As money dried up within the university, it became impossible to make new plans or to execute old ones. I had to constantly compromise on class size and hiring practices. But, while the compromises led to undesirable changes in the writing program at all levels, these compromises were necessary in order to prevent larger damage. I found the Dean's office a reasonable group who, when the English department administrators explained the need to keep class size in the freshman program at 22, listened and agreed, even though it would have been easier for them

financially to run it up to 25.

The other two problems that we faced will be harder to solve. The department needs another specialist in rhetoric if it hopes to develop the graduate program and cover the technical writing classes. Things are, however, looking better since our Romantic literature scholar returned and we hired two new Assistant Professors in 20th century British literature for 1993-94. Now is the time to argue for a third position in rhetoric.

The problem of hiring temporary, part-time instructors and lowering the class size in freshman English will be less easy to solve. Since the upper administration has required us to hire more TAs and fewer instructors, and since the State of Georgia's finances are not yet back in order, it would normally take us at least another year to begin hiring full-time instructors again. But these are not normal times. I have just learned that the College of Arts and Sciences at UGA has been borrowing against its future over the past two years and now suffers a deficit of 1.5 million dollars. Consequently, it will take at least three years for the college and the department to return to its pre-recession funding levels. Until that happens, the English department will find it difficult to lower class size and to return to hiring full time instructors.